



Inspecting policing  
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# Staffordshire Police's approach to tackling domestic abuse

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## Introduction

The extent and nature of domestic abuse remains shocking. A core part of the policing mission is to prevent crime and disorder. Domestic abuse causes both serious harm and constitutes a considerable proportion of overall crime. It costs society an estimated £15.7 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> 77 women were killed by their partners or ex-partners in 2012/13.<sup>2</sup> In the UK, one in four young people aged 10 to 24 reported that they experienced domestic violence and abuse during their childhood.<sup>3</sup> Forces told us that crime relating to domestic abuse constitutes some 8 percent of all recorded crime in their area, and one third of their recorded assaults with injury. On average the police receive an emergency call relating to domestic abuse every 30 seconds.

People may experience domestic abuse regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, age or disability. Domestic abuse may also occur in a range of different relationships including heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender, as well as within families.

While both men and women can be victims of domestic abuse, women are much more likely to be victims than men.

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is:

*“any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to:<sup>4</sup>*

- *psychological*
- *physical*
- *sexual*
- *financial*
- *emotional”.*

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<sup>1</sup> Walby, S. (2009). *The cost of domestic violence*. Retrieved from: [www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence\\_update.doc](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/doc.../Cost_of_domestic_violence_update.doc)

<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics (2013). *Focus on violent crime and sexual offences 2012/13 – Chapter 4: Intimate Personal Violence and Partner Abuse*. Retrieved from: [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_352362.pdf](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_352362.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Radford L, Corral S, Bradley C et al (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.

<sup>4</sup> All definitions are taken from [www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](http://www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse)

*Controlling behaviour* is defined as a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

*Coercive behaviour* is defined as: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This definition includes so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Tackling domestic abuse and keeping its victims safe is both vitally important, and incredibly complicated. The police service needs to have the right tools, resources, training and partnerships in place to help it identify victims and keep them safe. It also needs to investigate and bring to justice offenders, when no two domestic abuse environments are the same, and some victims have suffered in silence for years or even decades.

In September 2013, the Home Secretary commissioned HMIC to conduct an inspection.<sup>5</sup> We were asked to consider:

- the effectiveness of the police approach to domestic violence and abuse, focusing on the outcomes for victims;
- whether risks to victims of domestic violence and abuse are adequately managed;
- identifying lessons learnt from how the police approach domestic violence and abuse; and
- making any necessary recommendations in relation to these findings when considered alongside current practice.

To answer these questions, HMIC collected data and reviewed files from the 43 Home Office funded forces. We spoke to 70 victims of domestic abuse in focus groups throughout England and Wales and surveyed over 100 victims online. We also surveyed 200 professionals working with victims of domestic abuse.

We inspected all police forces in England and Wales, interviewing senior and operational leads in forces, holding focus groups with frontline staff and partners, and carrying out visits to police stations (which were unannounced) to test the reality of each force's approach with frontline officers. Our inspection teams were supplemented by expert peers, which included public protection experts from over 15 forces and those working with victims of

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<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-review-of-police-response-to-domestic-violence)

domestic abuse in voluntary and community sector organisations.

This report details what HMIC found in Staffordshire Police and at the end of the report we set out some recommendations. These recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations for all forces made in the national report.<sup>6</sup> A glossary of frequently used terms also appears at the end of the report.

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<sup>6</sup> There is a requirement under Section 55(5) and Section 55(6) of the Police Act 1996 for the Police and Crime Commissioner to publish a copy of their comments on this report and the recommendations for all forces in the national report and forward these to the Home Secretary.

## Domestic abuse in Staffordshire

### Calls for assistance



In Staffordshire, domestic abuse accounts for 5% of calls to the police for assistance. Of these calls, 32% were from repeat victims.

### Crime

# 10%

Domestic abuse accounts for 10% of all recorded crime.

### Assault with intent

# 13%

Staffordshire recorded 269 assaults with intent to cause serious harm, of these 36 were domestic abuse related. This is 13% of all assaults with intent to cause serious harm recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Assault with injury

# 30%

The force also recorded 6,884 assaults with injury, of these 2,084 were domestic abuse related. This is 30% of all assaults with injury recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

### Harassment

# 54%

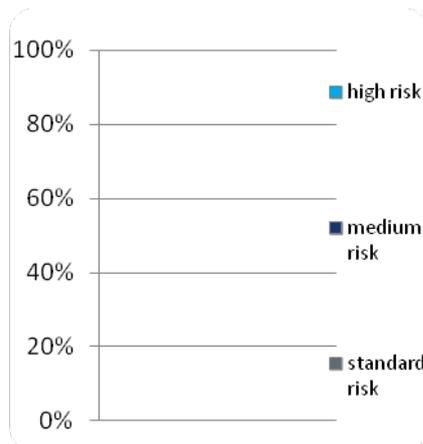
The force recorded 1,307 harassment offences, of these 704 were domestic abuse related. This is 54% of all harassment offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Sexual offences

# 13%

The force also recorded 1,246 sexual offences, of these 156 were domestic abuse related. This is 13% of all sexual offences recorded for the 12 months to end of August 2013.

## Risk levels



Staffordshire Police were unable to provide data relating to the number of active high, medium and standard risk cases they had.

## Arrests



For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded, there were 64 arrests in Staffordshire for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

## Outcomes



Staffordshire recorded 5,844 domestic abuse related crimes for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes, 26% resulted in a charge, 9% resulted in a caution and, 1% had an out of court disposal, for example, a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

## Executive summary

The public in Staffordshire can have some confidence that the police provide a good service to victims of domestic abuse and help keep them safe. Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force and staff demonstrated a high level of commitment and awareness. There are good relationships with partner agencies and examples of information being shared to help protect victims.

Domestic abuse crimes have a structured response from officers, which deals with perpetrators and safeguards victims. The response to victims of domestic incidents is less structured, and there is concern that victims of repeat incidents of domestic abuse may not be identified and their safety adequately addressed.

This report outlines a number of areas where the force could further strengthen its response.

### Identifying victims

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by the force when a call is made to the force control room. The force has good systems to identify repeat callers. Staff are trained and question callers to collect as much relevant information as possible. They do not use a list of questions to establish threat, harm and risk to a victim but instead use an established set of principles to do this. This helps inform the most appropriate response. They also research police databases to gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address to help the officers who are attending the incident. HMIC found operators used this method of establishing risk and were empathetic towards callers. There is a good process to quality assure calls about domestic abuse.

### Keeping victims safe

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force and the police and crime commissioner. However, training is inconsistent across the force and some officers are unaware that the definition of domestic abuse has changed and therefore may have missed some incidents. There is some concern that the lack of an immediate formal assessment of risk means that some victims may not receive the level of response and support they need in a timely way. The lack of necessity for officers to complete a risk assessment form for all domestic incidents may mean that repeated incidents viewed in isolation may appear minor, but when seen as a series present a far greater risk to a victim and may not be identified by the force. The force is one of the few nationally who do not use the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment, but they use a similar model known as DIAL.

Investigations are generally allocated on the basis of the seriousness of the crime rather than the level of risk to a victim. This may mean that inexperienced officers are dealing with the highest-risk cases.

Officers attending incidents involving domestic abuse are mindful of the need to ensure the safety of the victim and any children. They understand the needs to put measures in place to protect them.

## **Management of risk**

There is no specialist domestic abuse team in the force. This means that staff take responsibility for reducing risk to victims. This is enhanced by measures put in place by partner agencies, such as the local authority and health. These partners are made aware of the abuse via the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the local policing teams. Relationships with partner agencies are good and there is a strong sense of working together to help reduce the risk to victims. HMIC found that staff throughout the force takes responsibility for making victims safe and dealing properly with domestic abuse.

However, there is a delay in identifying the level of risk faced by victims, as this is not established by the attending officers but by the MASH having reviewed the officer's assessment. This review usually takes place the following day but over a weekend or public holiday period, can be up to 72 hours later. This delay is a concern and may mean that a victim does not receive the support they require as soon as possible and the risk to them is not addressed at the earliest opportunity.

## **Organisational effectiveness for keeping people safe**

HMIC found that there are good systems in place to identify and manage the safety of victims for the first 28 days after a domestic abuse related crime has been reported, using a seven-step plan, which is embedded and supervised. However, there is concern that the same does not apply where incidents of domestic abuse have been reported.

There are no robust systems in place to ensure that victims are informed when a perpetrator is released from prison and their risk re-assessed. This lack of clarity is a concern as this could place victims at risk of harm.

Partnership working is strong and information is shared to protect victims. The force has systems in place to understand learning from domestic homicide reviews and improve practice locally.

## Findings

### **How does the force identify victims of domestic abuse, and in particular repeat and vulnerable victims?**

Victims of domestic abuse are identified by the force when a call is made to the force control room. The force has good systems to identify repeat callers. Staff are trained and question callers to collect as much relevant information as possible. They do not use a list of questions to establish threat, harm and risk to a victim but instead use an established set of principles to do this. This helps inform the most appropriate response. They also research police databases to gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address to help the officers who are attending the incident. HMIC found operators used this method of establishing risk and were empathetic towards callers. There is a good process to quality assure calls about domestic abuse.

The majority of victims of domestic abuse are identified by the force when calls are received by the control room. Control room operators have received training and are able to identify domestic abuse victims at the first point of contact. The force has good systems to identify repeat callers. Staff are trained and question callers to collect as much relevant information as possible so they can establish risk levels before deciding the most appropriate response. They also research police databases to gather available information about a caller, perpetrator, family or address to help officers attending the incident to assess the threat of harm to a victim and their children.

When domestic abuse is reported, the details are recorded on an electronic database called STORM and given a specific domestic abuse code. STORM is the command and control system used in the force communication centre.

When an entry is placed on STORM a review of previous calls from that location is automatically made. This helps to identify repeat victims of domestic abuse. The force can add codes and markers to incidents, highlighting vulnerability and locations. If a caller has been previously identified as vulnerable, this will show on the call log, and the operator will decide on the best response for that person.

The force has adopted a set of principles known by the mnemonic 'THRIVE' (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative opportunity, Vulnerability and Engagement) to assess the likely threat or risk to an individual. The operator will ask questions of the caller using the THRIVE principles. They will also apply professional judgement to identify whether the caller presents as vulnerable and will identify if they are at immediate risk of harm. The force does not have an agreed definition of a vulnerable victim.

HMIC reviewed a small number of calls and found a consistent use of the THRIVE principles by call operators. Where a vulnerable victim has been identified, there is a quality assurance process. Calls are dip-sampled by supervisors to ensure compliance with the THRIVE principles, and that a professional and sensitive service was provided. One in every three calls reviewed as part of the dip sample must be a domestic abuse incident. There is no mandatory question set for operators to ask victims to identify vulnerability; staff reported this would inhibit the flow of the conversation with a caller at a time of crisis. The quality assurance checks have been introduced to ensure operators are making sound assessments.

At the time of the inspection, a repeat victim was not defined in force policy. The force had recognised this and it has been included in the new domestic abuse policy which is awaiting implementation. The definition is 'a victim who reports another incident of domestic abuse over a rolling 12-month period'.

The operator also checks the citizen focus toolkit (CFT), a database used by local officers and the intelligence system called SPIN. They will provide relevant information to the attending officer about the victim, and perpetrator, if identified. In particular, if the victim has been subject of previous reported domestic abuse incidents.

The operator usually deploys officers to attend immediately or as a priority. The control room supervisor oversees these deployments. In domestic abuse cases the supervisor is notified by an automated system if an immediate response incident is not resourced within three minutes and if the priority response is not dispatched within 20 minutes. The manager can then make a further assessment and send alternative officers if necessary.

In a few cases, a decision is made to respond by making a scheduled appointment. If this happens, two hours are allocated, as the force recognises domestic abuse victims often require more time with the responding officer.

HMIC found that domestic abuse is treated as a priority by the force and officers are deployed quickly. They are provided with useful information that helps them assess risk and meet the initial needs of the victim.

## **How does the force respond to victims of domestic abuse? This includes initial action, including risk assessment**

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the force and the police and crime commissioner. However, training is inconsistent across the force and some officers are unaware that the definition of domestic abuse has changed and therefore may have missed some incidents. There is some concern that the lack of an immediate formal assessment of risk means that some victims may not receive the level of response and support they need in a timely way. The lack of necessity for officers to complete a risk assessment form for all domestic incidents may mean that repeated incidents viewed in isolation may appear minor, but when seen as a series present a far greater risk to a victim and may not be identified by the force. The force is one of the few nationally who do not use the domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessment, but they use a similar model known as DIAL.

Investigations are generally allocated on the basis of the seriousness of the crime rather than the level of risk to a victim. This may mean that inexperienced officers are dealing with the highest-risk cases.

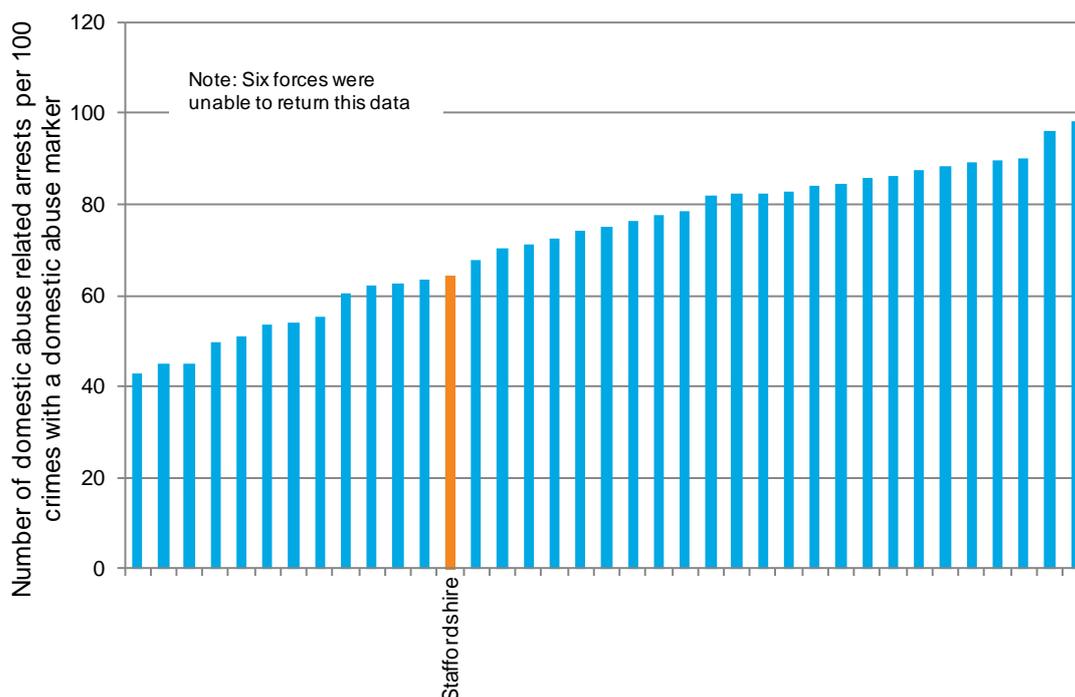
Officers attending incidents involving domestic abuse are mindful of the need to ensure the safety of the victim and any children. They understand the needs to put measures in place to protect them.

For every 100 domestic abuse crimes recorded there were 64<sup>7</sup> arrests in Staffordshire for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. For most forces the number is between 45 and 90.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

**Figure 1: Number of domestic abuse related arrests per 100 crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>8</sup>**



Officers will take positive action to safeguard a victim when they attend an incident. They will establish whether a crime has been committed. There is a different process for victims of domestic abuse crimes and victims of domestic abuse incidents where no crime has been committed.

The majority of domestic abuse incidents reported to the police are attended by uniformed response officers in the first instance. The response officers cover a 24/7 shift pattern and are the core officers who respond to calls that require immediate service from the police. Officers are expected to speak with the person who made the call, and to speak to victims of domestic abuse on their own, to establish the facts.

Staffordshire Police has a policy of taking positive action in all domestic abuse incidents. Where a crime has occurred, HMIC found that most officers understood this to mean arresting the perpetrator, though this is not a directive from the force and considerations regarding the necessity to arrest should be taken into account. Most domestic abuse perpetrators are dealt with in the forces custody interview teams (CIT). Detectives are assigned to investigations where the crime is serious or the investigation is more complex rather than when the case is high risk. It is the responsibility of the officer conducting the investigation – usually the interviewing officer – to keep the victim updated on progress, particularly in relation to releases from custody and bail conditions. Where investigations are allocated based on the seriousness of the crime rather than the highest level of risk, this can mean that, sometimes, inexperienced officers will be dealing with the highest risk cases.

The decision to charge a perpetrator with an offence is generally made by the CPS. Where this does not take place it must be authorised by an inspector. HMIC reviewed a small number of crime files and found this to be the case. This demonstrates the importance that the force places on domestic abuse crimes. However, there was very limited information recorded in the files where the police had made the decision to release the perpetrator with no further action to be taken. This was in contrast to CPS records which had very detailed rationales.

The force would benefit from greater supervision of domestic abuse crime investigations, to satisfy itself that the necessary victim support and vulnerability information is accurately recorded. It was evident from the review of the files that this is not considered when files are checked by supervisors.

A victim of a domestic abuse crime will be subject of a risk assessment which the officer must complete. This consists of a series of questions and officers record the answers on a DIAL form. Most of the questions require a tick box answer of 'Yes' or 'No'. However, there is a free text section for other relevant

information to be recorded. The answers to the questions provide an indication of the risk level to the victim; the process is the totalling of the 'Yes' answers, along with answers to key questions and professional judgement. The DIAL form must be submitted to an assessment team in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) before the officer goes off duty.

The domestic abuse risk assessment that is used by most police forces and approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) is known by the acronym of DASH. Staffordshire Police do not use DASH, but DIAL is a similar model.

Attending officers can also use their discretion on whether or not to complete a DIAL risk assessment when speaking with a victim of a domestic abuse incident that is not a crime. Officers informed the inspection team that they did not understand why there are different processes for crimes and incidents. There is a concern that repeat incidents, which viewed in isolation could appear minor, but when seen as a series present a far greater risk to a victim, may be missed by the force. Officers indicated where they had any concerns for a victim they would complete a DIAL form.

In addition to the DIAL risk assessment, where a victim has previously been identified as vulnerable or they are believed to be vulnerable, the attending officer is expected to complete a vulnerability assessment. When completed this must also be submitted to the MASH before the officer goes off duty.

When the DIAL risk assessment is completed, any details of children present in the house or usually present should be included on the form. If a domestic abuse incident has occurred the officer should either complete a DIAL or a multi-agency referral form (MARF), so that full details can be shared with partner agencies to protect and support the child if required. Officers should check the welfare of any child present at a domestic abuse incident; however, this is not a consistent practice as some officers were not aware they should check on children if they were asleep in bed.

The purpose of recording the details on a form, is so that a formal risk grade can be given, which is an indicator of the likely risk of harm to domestic abuse victims. When a victim is assessed as high risk they must be referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC) and provided with specialist support from an independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA).

When DIAL forms are not submitted this is a concern, as; part of the assessment process when victims are assessed or graded as likely to be at the highest risk of harm will be a referral to the MARAC. Information that is recorded on the forms relating to children is shared with the local authority. If forms are not being completed, there is a risk that information is not being

shared and appropriate action may not be being taken. The officer who completes the DIAL assessment is not aware of the risk grading when they leave the victim. This is rarely known at the point of handover; when a new shift of officers starts duty; or when the perpetrator is being dealt with. The inspection team found the risk grade is usually identified sometime the following day, but over a weekend or public holiday period, this can be up to 72 hours later. This delay is a concern and may mean that a victim does not receive the support they require at the earliest opportunity but could be a high-risk victim.

At the time of the inspection, the force identified that 38 percent of DIAL forms were not received in the MASH (that is, were non-compliant). This was the subject of a review by the force, comparing the recorded domestic abuse crimes, and cross referencing them with the DIAL form submissions. Daily management activity takes place to identify the reasons for the poor compliance and to instruct officers to retrospectively complete DIAL forms.

It is the responsibility of the attending officer to gather evidence for the investigation. This includes taking a written statement from the victim, noting any injuries or signs of a disturbance and having them photographed, and preserving forensic evidence where it is found.

In all domestic abuse incidents, the attending officer also has a responsibility to take action to safeguard the victim and any other vulnerable person including children. If there are children in the house, officers are required to physically check on their welfare and record their details on the DIAL form.

Vulnerability sergeants and partnership managers review all domestic abuse incidents in their area and identify the cases they will share at their partnership hub meetings. However, there is no consistent standard of threshold across the force and in the absence of a timely risk grading, the support offered to victims may differ.

It is the responsibility of the staff in the MASH to assign the risk level to the victim as low, medium or high. The staff review the question set, share and identify relevant information that is held by other agencies before a grade is applied. The MASH team also add information and tasks on the force databases.

Officers had not received recent or consistent domestic abuse training and some were not aware of the new ACPO definition of domestic abuse, which could mean they are not capturing relevant information on 16- and 17-year-olds and not contributing to the assessment of risk appropriately. Some staff did not have a clear understanding of harassment and coercive control. Awareness sessions had been arranged at a local level by some of the neighbourhood or vulnerability sergeants and had been well received by local officers.

HMIC found that some officers did not believe the MASH helped them in their support for victims of domestic abuse, though they recognised there was value in sharing the information with other agencies. Attending officers rarely received information back from the MASH regarding the risk grading. It was evident the officers were not aware of the information being added to the databases by the MASH team. Similarly they had not received additional partnership information to assist them in future dealings. Officers stated that the completion of the form has minimum bearing on the action they take with the victim. Therefore, this is primarily seen as a process rather than a useful indicator of risk.

## **How are victims of domestic abuse made safer as a result of the police response and subsequent action?**

There is no specialist domestic abuse team in the force. This means that staff take responsibility for reducing risk to victims. This is enhanced by measures put in place by partner agencies, such as the local authority and health. These partners are made aware of the abuse via the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and the local policing teams. Relationships with partner agencies are good and there is a strong sense of working together to help reduce the risk to victims. HMIC found that staff throughout the force takes responsibility for making victims safe and dealing properly with domestic abuse.

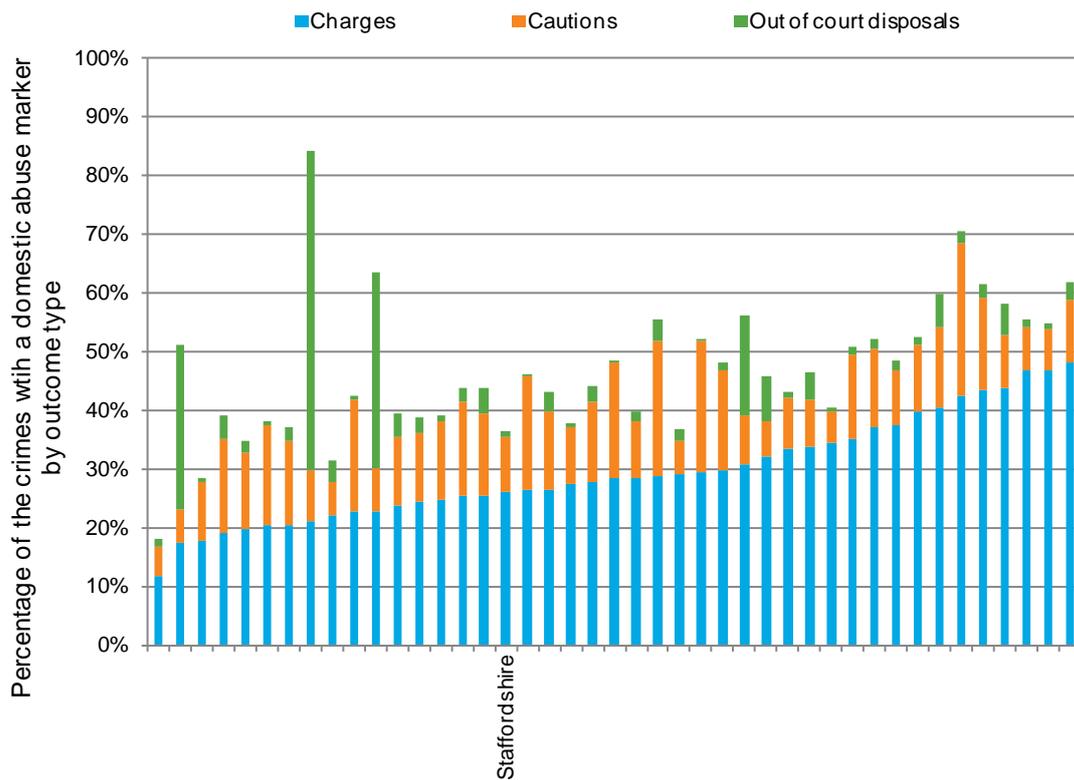
However, there is a delay in identifying the level of risk faced by victims, as this is not established by the attending officers but by the MASH having reviewed the officer's assessment. This review usually takes place the following day but over a weekend or public holiday period, can be up to 72 hours later. This delay is a concern and may mean that a victim does not receive the support they require as soon as possible and the risk to them is not addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Staffordshire recorded 5,844 domestic abuse related crimes<sup>9</sup> for the 12 months to the end of August 2013. Of these crimes 26 percent resulted in a charge, nine percent resulted in a caution and one percent had an out-of-court disposal, for example a fixed penalty notice for disorderly conduct.

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<sup>9</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

**Figure 2: Percentage of different outcome types used for crimes with a domestic abuse marker for the 12 months to 31 August 2013<sup>10</sup>**

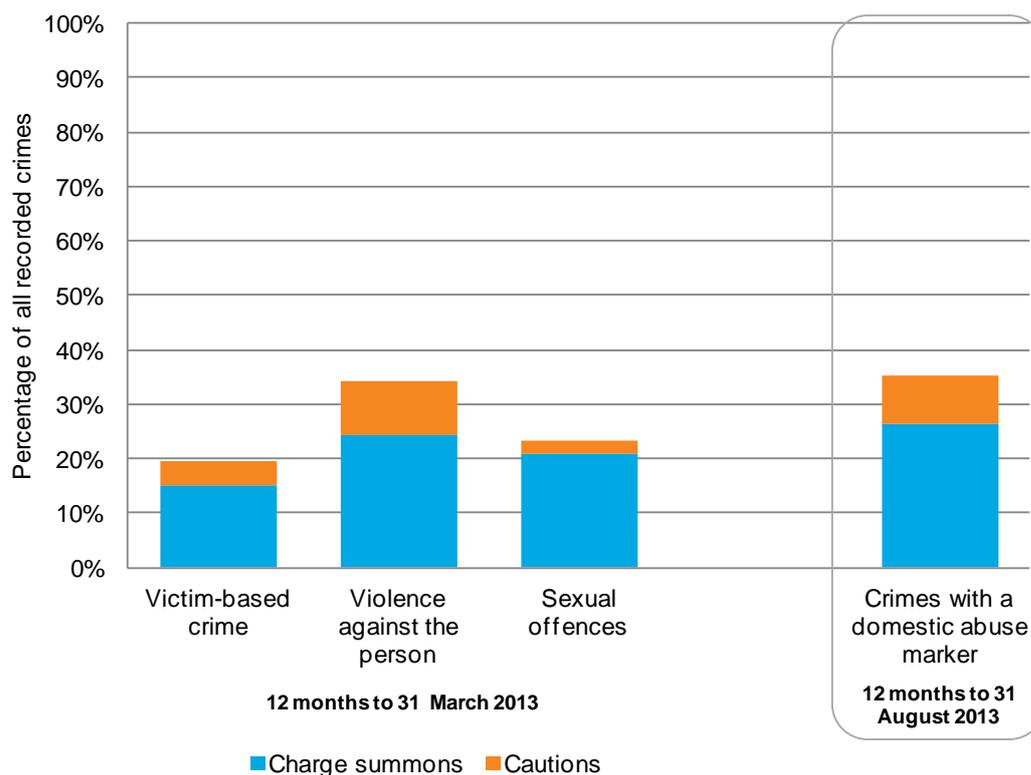


Source: HMIC data collection

Staffordshire Police charges a higher proportion of crimes with a domestic abuse marker than recorded victim-based crime. This may indicate that the force has a different approach to domestic abuse outcomes than other crimes.

<sup>10</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

**Figure 3: Percentage of charge summons and cautions used for victim-based crime, violence against the person, sexual offences and all crimes with a domestic abuse<sup>11</sup>**



Sources: HMIC data collection, Home Office Crimes detected in England and Wales, ONS Crime in England and Wales

The force does not have specialist domestic abuse staff. The policing response to domestic abuse has evolved from predominantly reactive, where officers attend an incident and deal with what they find, to a more proactive response. This involves an approach where officers will try to solve problems and prevent them happening in the future, with the intention of reducing the harm in communities. The force wants all staff to understand they have a responsibility to combat domestic abuse and not to rely on specialist officers, and HMIC found this was embedded throughout the force at all levels.

The MASH team are responsible for managing all safeguarding referrals including domestic abuse. Demand has increased significantly since the team was created.

<sup>11</sup> Based on forces' own definition of domestic abuse and use of a domestic abuse marker on IT systems.

Staff understood the concept of a MARAC, where information is shared with partner agencies relating to the victims deemed to be at the highest risk of harm. The MARACs appear effective and there is a high referral rate from partner agencies, who felt they had an equal representation at the meetings. The MARACs are well established, with clear guidance and terms of reference about how they refer cases into the MARAC embedded in their processes.

Sergeants and managers with responsibility for vulnerability discuss all domestic abuse crimes and some domestic abuse incidents at their meetings with partner agencies. They co-ordinate their services to support victims, and look for ways to minimise the risk of harm to them.

The discretionary completion of the DIAL risk assessment for domestic abuse incidents where no crime has taken place, and the poor compliance of submission of DIAL forms for domestic abuse, would put victims at greater risk if this was not being picked up in the 11 locality hubs on a daily basis. The hubs are located in each of the local policing territories (LPTs) and they operate effectively with partner agencies. Multi-agency meetings are held in each of the 11 LPTs daily, twice-weekly or weekly, dependant on the geographic area. Each agency shares appropriate information and agree a plan of action to support domestic abuse victims, along with driving activity to provide solutions for troubled families and reducing anti-social behaviour. The assessment of risk from the DIAL forms is too slow to inform operational activity. Therefore, informed prioritisation of resources to meet the individual need of the victim is not as effective as it could be. This could be resolved if the attending officer provided the graded assessment at the time of completing the form. This delay in establishing levels of risk is a concern and may mean that risk is not properly dealt with in a timely way that meets a victim's needs.

Any action the police take or intend to take in relation to an incident or crime of domestic abuse is recorded on the citizen focus toolkit (CFT) database by neighbourhood officers. The action plans must be updated by the local police teams at least once every ten days.

The hubs work well, and representatives from partner agencies described a strong relationship with Staffordshire Police, indicating they had access to people, information and resources when required. In particular the partners identified the local police team supervisors as a pivotal contact for any issues they need to address. Local officers indicated they had reciprocal access with the other agencies and highlighted the strong effective relationship with local independent domestic abuse advisers (IDVAs).

We found that partnership working is constructive. Partners were very positive about their relationship with the force, and the effectiveness of joint working to

tackle domestic abuse, in particular, to reduce the risk to victims. However, while the partnership hubs are acknowledged to work well, the force does not have a consistent process for the review and threshold of incidents that are referred into the hubs. There is also duplication of work where both the staff in the MASH and the LPTs are reviewing the same incidents and tasking activity in isolation of each other. This can result in the same agencies being used twice for the same service. The result for victims is that they may be contacted by more than one person about the same thing.

The current processes used by Staffordshire Police are hindered by the number of databases used to record information. The inspection team identified nine distinct databases and many officers were not aware of information that was available. In particular the CFT was well used by neighbourhood officers but not widely accessed by response and detectives. The force is progressing work to provide a more effective IT system.

## **Does the force have appropriate systems, processes and understanding to manage domestic abuse and risk to victims in the future?**

HMIC found that there are good systems in place to identify and manage the safety of victims for the first 28 days after a domestic abuse related crime has been reported, using a seven-step plan, which is embedded and supervised. However, there is concern that the same does not apply where incidents of domestic abuse have been reported.

There are no robust systems in place to ensure that victims are informed when a perpetrator is released from prison and their risk re-assessed. This lack of clarity is a concern as this could place victims at risk of harm.

Partnership working is strong and information is shared to protect victims. The force has systems in place to understand learning from domestic homicide reviews and improve practice locally.

Staffordshire Police has a structured process that ensures all victims of domestic abuse crimes receive a consistent service from local staff, at seven distinct stages. The plan is known as the seven-step plan. Steps 1–3 are grouped together as the ‘golden hour’ of response. This is a term commonly used in investigations where the opportunity for obtaining the maximum evidence can usually be achieved. Steps 4–7 set out follow-up contact.

The seven-step plan is summarised as:

Step 1: Recognise a domestic abuse crime and respond immediately or as a priority.

- Step 2: The control room searches for intelligence on systems to provide attending officers with relevant information.
- Step 3: Officers attend the scene and take positive action. They secure and preserve evidence and identify safeguarding issues.
- Step 4: Within 24 hours of the report, a neighbourhood officer will visit the victim to provide reassurance, signpost to other agencies and review the safeguarding issues.
- Step 5: Within the next two weeks, neighbourhood officers and police community support officers continue to provide reassurance visits.
- Step 6: Within the same weeks, a reassurance letter is sent to the victim from the local inspector.
- Step 7: 28 days after the initial report, the local neighbourhood officers or PCSOs visit the victim, update them on the investigation and review ongoing support.

HMIC found this process is embedded and consistently applied across the force. There is good evidence that the local police community support officers take an active and purposeful role in supporting victims through the process. There was a clear and comprehensive understanding of the issues involved in domestic abuse and the complexities of dealing with victims. Supervision of the seven-step plan is evident and given priority and value. If capacity would allow, this process would undoubtedly benefit all domestic abuse victims, not just those who are victims of a recorded crime. The current systems and processes for domestic abuse incidents (rather than crimes) are a concern as the response across the force means that important opportunities to intervene and reduce risk are missed.

The seven-step plan covers what the force will do up to 28 days from an incident, but there is no formal process to re-assess the risk to the victim when there is a change in circumstances beyond this. This is a concern, as any changes, particularly if a perpetrator is released from prison, may have a considerable effect on the risk to a victim.

Local management of domestic abuse incidents is progressed very effectively in the partnership hubs. The partnership approach to reduce incidents of harm is evident. There are hub processes that focus on activities to support the reduction. These include identifying:

- safeguarding risks and opportunities for intervention.
- partnership intervention activity to minimise risk of future / repeat domestic abuse behaviour.
- safeguarding opportunities, for victims and children, from risk of harm.
- support opportunities for victim / family including statutory and voluntary sector pathways.
- pathways for early intervention for perpetrator behaviour change and signposting to support agencies.
- opportunities for Sanctuary referrals or property security opportunities for families at risk of harm.

and considering:

- links to integrated offender management programmes and share information as required in line with local policies to ensure safeguarding risks are shared.
- escalation opportunities if required to MASH / MARAC processes.

Information in the partnership hubs is confidently shared and meaningful action is taken. Local managers have good knowledge of the troubled families in their area and can task their staff accordingly to minimise harm in their communities.

Staffordshire Police supports this from a force perspective by co-ordinating the learning from local and national public protection reviews, and by assessing their position against the recommendations, and creating an action plan, if there are areas to improve. The force has a detective sergeant working under the direction of the head of public protection to manage this process.

Analytical work has taken place to try and identify the future risks and threats to communities and details are documented in the force strategic assessment. This has highlighted complex 'hidden demand', associated with domestic abuse. The ACC intends to use this information, and work with local partners, to reduce the harm in their communities together. The ACC attends all the local safeguarding adult and children's boards and chairs the governing board for the sexual assault referral centre.

## Recommendations

As a result of this inspection, HMIC has developed recommendations which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These force-specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with recommendations to all forces set out in HMIC's national report on domestic abuse.

1. The force should ensure that domestic abuse investigations are properly supervised and allocated to trained staff taking into consideration the level of risk to the victim in addition to the seriousness of the crime.
2. The force should review its mandatory risk assessment process to ensure a quick and appropriate level of service for every victim of domestic abuse.
3. The force should require officers to physically check on the welfare of children present in households where domestic abuse is reported, and review officers' compliance.
4. The force should review the training already received by staff and establish the domestic abuse training required relevant to officer's roles.
5. The force is to implement a consistent process and criteria of domestic abuse incident referrals to the LPT partnership hubs and reduce the duplication of tasking partnership agencies.
6. The force should inform victims when their perpetrators are released from prison and re-assess the level of risk to them.



# Glossary

## **Bail conditions**

A court can remand a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached. Before the first court hearing, the police can also retain a defendant in custody or grant bail, with or without conditions attached, but their powers to do so are more limited than the court's. Conditions can only be imposed to ensure that the defendant attends the next court hearing, commits no new offences in the meantime, and does not interfere with any witnesses or obstruct the course of justice.

## **Body worn camera**

A video camera, worn on the helmet or upper body of an officer, which records visual and audio footage of an incident.

## **CAADA (Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse)**

CAADA is a national charity supporting a strong multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Its work focuses on saving lives and public money.

CAADA provides practical help to support professionals and organisations working with domestic abuse victims. The aim is to protect the highest risk victims and their children – those at risk of murder or serious harm.

## **CCTV**

Evidence from Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) can be used to support police investigations. It is primarily used for corroborating what is already known in investigating incidents and to trigger further opportunities to carry out investigation, such as the identification of witnesses and suspects.

## **Clare's Law**

Clare's Law – the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was

brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

### **Code of Practice for Victims of Crime**

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code) places a statutory obligation on criminal justice agencies to provide a standard of service to victims of crime or, where the victim died as a result of the criminal conduct, their relatives. The obligations the Victims' Code places on the agencies concerned include that:

- They provide victims, or their relatives, with information about the crime, including about arrests, prosecutions and court decisions;
- They provide information about eligibility for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme;
- Victims be told about Victim Support and either be referred on to them or offered their service;
- Bereaved relatives be assigned a family liaison police officer; and
- Victims of an offender who receives a sentence of 12 months or more after being convicted of a sexual or violent offence have the opportunity to make representations about what licence conditions or supervision requirements the offender should be subject to on release from prison.

There are enhanced entitlements for victims of the most serious crime which includes domestic violence.

### **Coercive control**

This is term and concept developed by Evan Stark which seeks to explain the range of tactics used by perpetrators and the impact of those on victims. It highlights the on-going nature of the behaviour and the extent to which the actions of the perpetrator control the victim through isolation, intimidation, degradation and micro-regulation of everyday life. Crucially it sets out such abuse can be psychological as well as physical. Coercive control is explicitly covered by the definition of domestic abuse.

### **Control room**

A police control or communications room manages emergency (999) and non-emergency (101) calls, and sending police officers to these calls.

## **Counter-allegation**

Where someone initially identified as the perpetrator makes an allegation against the victim. If counter-allegations are not identified and resolved agencies may be providing services to the perpetrator and inadvertently helping them isolate and control the victim. The victim may not get access to the services they need because they are labelled 'the perpetrator'.

## **Crime Scene Investigator**

Police staff who work alongside uniformed and plain clothed police officers during the investigation of a crime to locate, record and recover evidence from crime scenes.

## **DASH – domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH 2009)**

DASH is a risk identification, assessment and management model adopted by UK police forces and partner agencies in 2009. The aim of the DASH assessment is to help front-line practitioners identify high risk cases of domestic abuse, stalking and so-called honour-based violence.

## **Domestic Homicide Review**

Local areas are expected to undertake a multi-agency review following a domestic homicide. The process aims to assist all those involved, to identify the lessons that can be learned from homicides where a person is killed as a result of domestic violence, with a view to preventing future homicides and violence.

## **Domestic Violence Prevention Notices (DVPN)**

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence.

This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively bar the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

A DVPN may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that:

- the individual has been violent towards, or

- has threatened violence towards an associated person, and
- the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

Female genital mutilation (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is illegal in the UK.

### **Frontline**

These are police officers or police staff who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law. The HMIC publication, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge* (2013) sets this out in more detail.

### **Golden hour**

Commonly used to refer to the time after a crime has been committed during which there is maximum potential for recovery of forensic evidence

### **Harassment**

The term harassment is used to cover the 'causing alarm or distress' offences under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 as amended (PHA), and 'putting people in fear of violence' offences under section 4 of the PHA.

### **House-to- house**

House-to-house enquiries are likely to feature in many investigations to: identify suspects and canvas for witnesses in areas connected to an incident, establish who lives or works in a particular location, and obtain an account of their movements during relevant times.

## **High risk**

Term used when, following a DASH risk assessment, there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event could happen at any time and the impact would be serious. Risk of serious harm (Home Office 2002 and OASys 2006): 'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible'.

## **IDVA – independent domestic violence adviser**

Independent domestic violence advisers or advocates (IDVAs) are trained specialists who provide a service to victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners, ex-partners or family members, with the aim of securing their safety and the safety of their children. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

## **Incident**

When a member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime the police usually create an incident record. This is the first step, the police will then decide whether a crime has been committed and, if it is appropriate, create a crime record.

## **Intimate Partner Violence**

This describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy.

## **MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference)**

MARACs are regular local meetings where information about high risk domestic abuse victims (those at risk of murder or serious harm) is shared between local agencies. By bringing all agencies together at a MARAC, and ensuring that whenever possible the voice of the victim is represented by the IDVA, a risk focused, co-ordinated safety plan can be drawn up to support the victim. There are currently over 270 MARACs operating across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland managing more than 64,000 cases a year.

## **MASH – Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub**

A Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) brings together staff from police and partner agencies who work from the same location, sharing information and ensuring a timely and joined-up response to protect children and vulnerable adults.

## **Medium risk**

Term used when following a DASH risk assessment there are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The offender has the potential to cause serious harm but is unlikely to do so unless there is a change in circumstances, for example, failure to take medication, loss of accommodation, relationship breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse.

## **National Domestic Abuse helpline**

A Freephone 24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline, run in partnership between Women's Aid and Refuge, is a national service for women experiencing domestic violence, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

The Helpline can give support, help and information over the telephone, wherever the caller might be in the country. The Helpline is staffed 24 hours a day by fully trained female helpline support workers and volunteers. All calls are completely confidential. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English, and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are available.

## **Partnership**

A term used where collaborative working is established between the police and other public, private or voluntary organisations.

## **Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)**

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the PACE codes of practice provide the core framework of police powers and safeguards around stop and search, arrest, detention, investigation, identification and interviewing detainees.

[www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-and-criminal-evidence-act-1984-pace-current-versions)

### **Positive action**

The term refers to the steps and action taken at all stages of the police response to ensure effective protection of victims and children, while allowing the criminal justice system to hold the offender to account. It is often used in the context of arrest policy, police guidance states that “arrest will normally be ‘necessary’ under the terms of PACE to protect a child or vulnerable person, prevent the suspect causing injury and/or to allow for the prompt and effective investigation of the offence”.

### **Problem-solving**

Problem-solving is a term used in policing where forces systematically identify and analyse crime and disorder problems, develop specific responses to individual problems and subsequently assess whether the response has been successful.

### **Refuge**

A refuge is a safe house where women and children who are experiencing domestic violence can stay free from abuse. Refuge addresses (and sometimes telephone numbers) are confidential. According to Women’s Aid on a typical day, **over 7000 women and children** are resident in refuge accommodation in England

### **Risk assessment**

A risk assessment is based on structured professional judgment. It provides structure and informs decisions that are already being made. It is only a guide/checklist and should not be seen as a scientific predictive solution. Its completion is intended to assist officers in the decision-making process on appropriate levels of intervention for victims of domestic violence.

## **Safeguarding**

The term safeguarding is applied when protecting children and other vulnerable people. The UK Government has defined the term 'safeguarding children' as: *"The process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully."*

## **Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC)**

SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted.

They aim to be a one-stop service, providing the following under one roof: medical care and forensic examination following assault/rape and, in some locations, sexual health services.

## **Standard Risk**

Term used following a DASH risk assessment where current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

## **Victim Personal Statement**

The Victim Personal Statement (VPS) gives victims an opportunity to describe the wider effects of the crime upon them, express their concerns and indicate whether or not they require any support.

Provisions relating to the making of a VPS and its use in criminal proceedings are included in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims' Code), which was published on 29 October 2013 and came into force on 10 December 2013.

## **Vulnerable**

A term used to describe a person who is in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.

## **What Works Centre for Crime Reduction**

The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction is hosted by the College of Policing. The What Works Centre for Crime Reduction will: review research on practices and interventions to reduce crime, label the evidence base in terms of quality, cost and impact, and provide police and crime commissioners and other crime reduction partners with the knowledge, tools and guidance to help them target their resources more effectively.

It will be led by a core team from the College of Policing, and supported by a "commissioned partnership programme" which has been jointly funded by the College and the Economic and Social Research Council.